











- (71) VIII. Charles DeWitt,<sup>5</sup> b. in Sempronius, Sept. 23, 1817; m. Feb. 11, 1840, Julia Etta Green; is by occupation a mason, and res. at St. Paul, Minn. [Died July 27, 1854.]
- (72) IX. Phoebe Maria,<sup>5</sup> in Sempronius, Nov. 23, 1819; d. unmarried at Adrian, Mich., July 2, 1843.

A  
NARRATIVE  
OF THE  
SINGULAR SUFFERINGS  
OF  
JOHN FILLMORE  
AND OTHERS,

ON BOARD THE NOTED PIRATE VESSEL COMMANDED BY

CAPTAIN PHILLIPS:

*With an Account of their daring Enterprise, and happy Escape  
the tyranny of that desperate Crew, by  
capturing their Vessel.*

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Let fiction drop, let scenes like these be read,  
And virtue shudder while it reads with dread:  
Yet realize a sovereign Power presides,  
And for the tempted orders and provides—  
Restrains the wrath of man, and guides the ways  
Of desperate gangs to issue in his praise.

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**AURORA:**  
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1837.

[Facsimile of title-page of John Fillmore's "Narrative," 1837.]

## INTRODUCTION

MR. JOHN FILLMORE, the principal subject of the following narrative, was an early settler in Norwich, Connecticut, where he sustained the character of a virtuous and industrious citizen, and by a relation of the incidents of his unfortunate seafaring excursions, frequently raised the admiration and excited the sympathetic feelings of his neighbors; while by ascribing his deliverance to the overruling hand of Providence, his solemnity induced praise, and the agitation of his bosom occasioned the feeling tear to flow from his own eyes, and the eyes of his audience.

Mr. James Cheeseman, returned to England, where he was rewarded by the British government, and enjoyed until his death, the place of quartermaster in the King's dock yard at Portsmouth. He sustained thro' all the character of a serious man, and like his fellow sufferer, Fillmore, lived beloved, and died respected.

BENNINGTON (VT.), SEPT., 1804.



## NARRATIVE, ETC.

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The depravity of the human mind is so universally acknowledged in the present enlightened age, and the belief of the universal presidency of Providence over the affairs of men so evidently established, as to need no argument to enforce the reception of a narrative in which both are peculiarly manifest.

Convinced of the truth of the above sentiment, I shall proceed in my narrative, endeavoring on the one hand to avoid tedious repetitions, and on the other to omit no incident that may afford entertainment to my courteous reader.

My father dying when I was young, my mother put me apprentice to learn the trade or occupation of a carpenter. On the other side of the road, opposite to the house where I lived, there dwelt a tailor, who had an apprentice named William White, with whom I was intimate during the time of his apprenticeship; but he was out of his time, and went to sea some time before I was free, being about three years older than myself.

White did not return as was expected, nor do I remember that I ever saw or heard of him afterwards till I found him among the pirates.

From my youth I had an almost irresistible desire for undertaking a voyage to sea, which I resolved at all events to gratify, as soon as I obtained a right to dispose of myself. In establishing this resolution, a love of novelty, joined to a secret delight I enjoyed in hearing sailors relate the curiosities they met with in their voyages, doubtless had a great effect, and the older I grew, stronger became the impression.

But however strong my desire was to follow the sea, a sense of duty I owed my surviving parent, so far overbalanced my inclination, as to occasion me to form a determination not to gratify it until I should be of age, unless I could gain her consent. The propensity, however, was so strong, as to induce me at the age of seventeen, to apply to my mother, and request her liberty to go a voyage to sea. My mother was very uneasy at the request, and used every art of persuasion that maternal tenderness could dictate, to induce me to

relinquish the design; expressing some surprise that I should entertain any idea of following the sea, as it was a life most evidently attended with innumerable fatigues and dangers; urging as a particular reason for her disapprobation of the measure, the melancholy fate of my father, who, being a seafaring man, was taken by a French frigate, on a voyage homeward bound, and carried into Martinico, a number of years before, where he underwent all the hardships of a close and cruel confinement, and although ultimately redeemed with many others, was supposed to be most inhumanly poisoned by the French, on board the cartel, as they principally died on their passage home.

However strong an argument this might have appeared to my mother, it failed of its desired effect on me; it only lulled my desire for a while, but by no means eradicated it. I waited, however, with a great degree of patience about two years longer, when I again asked leave to go a voyage to the West Indies, and my mother finding my resolution unabated, concluded she could as well part with me then as when I became of age, after which she imagined she should not be able to detain me. Upon the whole, she told me she was unwilling I should go to the West Indies, but that the sloop, *Dolphin*, Capt. Haskel, was then in the harbor, fitting out for a fishing voyage, and if I would go with him she would give her consent. To this proposal I readily assented.

I accordingly shipped on board the sloop, and had a tolerable passage to the fishing ground; but soon after our arrival there, we were surprised by the appearance of a ship which, from external signs, we suspected to be a pirate. We were not by any means prepared to oppose so formidable an enemy, and she was so close upon us before we suspected her, as to render it impossible for us to escape by running away, we were therefore obliged to abide our fate peaceably, let the consequence be what it would.

The pirate soon came up and sent a boat on board our sloop, demanding who we were, and where we were bound? To which our Captain gave a direct answer. By this boat's crew we learned that the noted pirate, Captain Phillips, commanded their ship. This intelligence, it will readily be conceived, gave us great uneasiness, most of our crew being quite young. Having often heard of the cruelties committed by that execrable pirate, made us dread to fall into his hands.

The pirate's boat soon boarded us again, demanding the name of every hand on board. In this boat came WHITE, the tailor, with whom I had been acquainted during his apprenticeship, as before mentioned. I was greatly surprised to find him employed in so

criminal a course of life, though I said nothing of the matter to him. On the return of the pirate's boat with a list of our names, White, as I was afterwards informed, acquainted Phillips of his knowledge of me, informing him, that if he could engage me in his service, he would gain a good, stout, resolute fellow, every way, he supposed, such a hand as he wanted.

On receiving this information, as he stood in need of a hand, and found we had no property he wanted on board, he sent his boat once more, with orders to Capt. Haskel, to send me on board his ship, and the rest of his crew, with the sloop, may go free. My worthy commander, with much visible concern in his countenance, took me aside, and informed me of Phillips' orders, adding, that although it would be exceedingly disagreeable and painful to him to let me go, yet we were entirely in the power of a bloody, merciless ruffian, and had no hopes of escape, but by giving me up, I believe, says he, you must go and try your fortune with him.

The thought of being sacrificed, as it were, to procure liberty for the rest of the crew, operated greatly upon my spirits, and the conclusion I drew up was, that I would not, on any conditions, agree to go on board the pirate. I therefore told my Captain that I had ever been faithful to his interests and commands, that I had always wished to do my duty punctually and well, but that I was determined not to go on board the pirate, let the consequence be what it would. Our conversation ended here, for that time, and the boat returned without me.

Phillips was greatly incensed when the boat returned without me, and sent again, with orders to bring me either dead or alive. My Captain took me aside again, and told me the pirate's resolution and message, adding, that he believed I should do well to go with them, for if I refused to go, and made resistance, it would be inevitable death to me, and probably to our whole crew. He urged further, that my submitting would prove the certain release of the rest of the crew, and there would be at least a probability of my making an escape from them at some time or other; but if I could not find a way to escape, it was not impossible but Phillips might discharge me, for he had sent word that if I would agree to serve him faithfully for two months, he would then set me at liberty.

Those only who have been in similar circumstances can form any adequate idea of the distress I experienced at this time. If I obstinately refused to join the pirates, instant death stared me and my comrades in the face; if I consented to go with them, I expected to be massacred for refusing to sign the piratical articles, which I had fully determined never to do, though I should be put to the extremity

of torture for refusal. Into so critical a situation had my bad fortune plunged me, that inevitable destruction seemed to stare me in the face from every quarter.

I took the matter, however, into serious consideration, and after the most mature deliberation determined to venture myself among them, rather than bring the vengeance of the pirates upon my comrades; I therefore went with them, seemingly content, and the Captain renewing his promise to set me at liberty in two months, I engaged to serve him to the best of my abilities during that term.

I was likewise agreeably disappointed in their not urging so strenuously as I expected, the thing I most of all dreaded, viz., the signing of the articles. To induce me to join them, they used more arguments of a persuasive than a compulsory nature, judging, I suppose, that youth would be more easily enticed than compelled to join in sharing their ill-gotten gain.

When I first went on board the pirate, their crew consisted of ten men, including the Captain; and the whole of them I think, as stout, daring, hardy-looking fellows as I ever saw together. As I was then the only hand on board who had not subscribed to their articles, the Captain assigned me the helm, where I kept my station during the greatest part of the time I stayed with them.

No captures of any consequence were made during the first two months. Some small vessels were taken, but their loading was too inconsiderable to satisfy the insatiable disposition of the pirates.

The period being now arrived, when I had a right according to agreement, to demand my liberty, I thought it a proper season at least to remind the Captain of the manumission he had engaged me. For this purpose I went to him, and in language the least offensive that I could frame, reminded him of his promise and requested him to fulfill it. Phillips, in tolerable good humor, replied, that we had done but little business since I came aboard; that he could not well spare me yet, but if I would stay with him three months longer, he would then set me at liberty, *upon his honor*; and I was obliged quietly to comply with his demands, and trust to his honor, though it turned out in the end that he did but mock me.

Nothing of importance occurred during these three months. Some few small vessels were taken and plundered; their cargoes were of no great value, and their hands were dismissed with their vessels, except two or three robust, stout looking men, whom Phillips picked from among them, and compelled to sign his articles.

When the three months were expired, I went to the Captain, and once more reminded him of the expiration of my servitude, and handsomely requested him to set me ashore, according to his promise, that

I might go to my mother, who had not heard from me since my first Captain returned from his fishing voyage.

"Set you at liberty! damn you; you shall be set at liberty when I'm damned, and not before," replied Phillips, in a rage more compatible with the diabolical disposition of an infernal fiend, than a being endowed with a rational soul, susceptible of human sensations.

It is evident, and experience daily evinces, that persons by habituating themselves to any particular vice, become so familiarized thereto, as to be unable to distinguish it from a real virtue; and in such case, conscience ceases to alarm the understanding, and suffers the culprit to pursue it to its extremity. This was undoubtedly the case with Captain Phillips, who was not addicted to one particular vice, but to every vice.

Having now lost all hope and probability of being liberated, there was no alternative more eligible for me than to sustain my servitude with as much patience, resolution, and fortitude as possible. Although the Captain had asserted that I should not be set at liberty till he was damned, I was still in hopes that we might be taken by some vessel, or that we might take more prisoners, who, in concert with myself, might be able to contrive some plan whereby we might take the ship, and thereby incapacitate Phillips to determine whether I should obtain my freedom before he received his final doom or not.

As we were sailing one day, we came within view of a fine merchant vessel, the appearance of which pleased the Captain much, who swore by Heaven he would have it. I was ordered to bear off for her as direct as possible. Phillips, being extremely anxious for taking this vessel, walked the deck with his glass in his hand, viewing her the greatest part of the day, and damning me because, as he said, I did not steer so well as I might.

Eleven holes he cut through my hat and the skin of my head, without the least provocation, with his broad sword. But the merchantman being light built, and completely rigged, left sight of us before night. Phillips exclaimed in a horrid rage, that the loss of that fine ship was all my damn'd doings; adding, that he wanted the damn'd thing just long enough to sail to hell in.

We had several prisoners on board, Frenchmen and negroes; we had also an American, with whom I had been intimately acquainted when young, and whom the pirates could not persuade or compel to sign their articles. Thus fortune had sent me one friend with whom I could sympathize under my almost insupportable calamities; though our sympathy was chiefly confined to looks and private gestures, for we durst not complain in the hearing of the crew.

About the end of the seventh month from my entering on board, we took a merchantman belonging to Boston, Captain Harridon commander, a young man about twenty-two years of age. The father of this young man was a merchant in Boston, and had given his son the education requisite for a mariner, and sent him to the West Indies, Captain of this vessel, in which he was returning home when we took him.

All except Harridon, James Cheeseman, a ship carpenter, and a Spanish Indian, who was taken with Harridon, the friend alluded to above, and myself, had been compelled to sign the pirate's articles. We had been enjoined to sign them, but had utterly refused, choosing rather to be killed by the villains than to be taken, condemned and executed, for being their associates. But I suppose they thought we might be serviceable to them, and therefore deemed it best not to dispatch us yet.

One day we took a large vessel after considerable trouble in chasing, but found nothing on board worthy the attention of the pirates, except their provisions and water, which being in some want of, Phillips stript of it entirely, took out one or two of their hands, and let them go.

Some of the pirates having been sent on board of Harridon's vessel, there remained only six of the old pirates on board, besides those who had been forced to sign their articles; and as there were five of us who wished to escape from them, we began to think and even suggest trying some scheme to effect that purpose. There was no time that we could confer together without being discovered, except in the dead of night, and even then we durst not be all together, and consequently could not, without great difficulty succeed in forming any regular plan to effect our escape.

One day we came in sight of a merchantman which Phillips imagining would prove a valuable prize, gave orders for chasing. His orders were put into execution immediately, but the merchantman being light built, and a prime sailor, we chased her three days before we were able to capture her. Having made what disposition he pleased of the hands, &c., he found on board the new prize, Phillips ordered one Fern, a daring, resolute fellow of the old pirate crew, to go on board of her, and take command, taking some of the old crew along with him.

Phillips had now become so extremely arbitrary as to be hated by his own crew, but they stood in such dread of him that they durst no more contradict his orders than they durst to die. Soon after night came on, Fern proposed to the pirates with him, that as they were now in possession of a fine vessel, every way fitted for a

cruizer, and as good sailor as Phillips', if they would join him, he would put out his lights and steering by the light of the old pirate, make their escape from the tyranny of Phillips, and set up for themselves. The crew accordingly joined, and they began to execute their plan, but Phillips suspecting their design, on finding they darkened their ship, put out his own light, and endeavored to follow them; in which design he succeeded so well as to be in sight of them the next morning. We continued to chase the new pirate till the third day, before we came up with her, when a fierce engagement ensued; but Fern soon finding himself overpowered, and no hope of escape, sent word to Phillips, that if he would grant him pardon, he would strike to him, and once more serve him faithfully; but if not, they would all fight till they died. Phillips immediately complied with their demand and sent orders for Fern to come aboard his ship, which he did; and Phillips, not regarding his engagement to pardon, immediately ran his sword through his body, and then blew his brains out with his pistol, and thus glutted his own vengeance, and ridded us of a desperate enemy.

I mentioned before, that there were five of us who had not signed the pirate's articles; and as Phillips, by killing Fern, had left but five of the old pirate crew alive, we began to conceive it a proper opportunity to make our escape. We were, however, exceedingly cautious, and had not yet an opportunity to communicate our plans to my New England friend before mentioned; yet conscience made the pirates suspicious of something of the kind being in agitation, and from the consequent murderous procedure of Phillips, we had reason to apprehend they had in reality discovered our intentions.

My friend, the American before mentioned, being on board the vessel lately taken from Captain Harridon, Phillips ordered out a boat, and went on board, where he accused him with joining a plot, assisted by me, to kill him and all his crew, and take the vessel. My friend solemnly denied the accusation, and declared he knew nothing of such a plan, (which was in fact the case; for I afterwards learned that there had been nothing said to him about it). This reply, however true, did not mitigate the Captain's passion in the least, for he damned him, and swore he would send him to hell, and instantly ran him through the body with his sword, in such a manner that he twisted the point of it off, leaving it in his back bone.

My friend, I suppose, not being conscious of having received his death wound, still denied the charge, and with great earnestness begged that his life might be spared; but the Captain, whose insatiable thirst for slaughter was not sufficiently gorged, damned him, presented his pistol and shot him through the head, exclaiming, I

have sent one of the devils to hell; and where is Fillmore? he shall go next. I was then ordered to go aboard Harridon's vessel.

My long familiarity with, and constant apprehension of death, rendered its near approaches less terrifying than formerly; but I did not receive this sentence without heart rending sensations, and thrilling emotions of trepidation and fear. But Phillips was completely despotic and there was no such thing as evading his commands; I therefore drew up a resolution, that if I found he was bent on my death, I would sell my life as dear as possible, and endeavor to kill him first. With this resolution, and as much fortitude as I could muster, I went on board to Phillips, and stood by a handspike that lay on the deck. Phillips charged me, as he had done my friend, with contriving to betray him, and take the ship. The accusation was true enough, but I concluded a lie was warrantable in that case, and consequently replied, that I knew nothing of any conspiracy either against him or his crew. I had prepared to make resistance, in case he offered any abuse; but he had a pistol concealed under his coat, which he presented to my breast, and snapped it, before I had time to make any evasion; but happily for me it missed fire. He drew it back, cocked, and presented it again, but I struck it aside with my hand, so that it went off by my side, without doing any injury.

I thought of knocking out his brains with the handspike that lay near me, but I knew it would be instant death for me, and therefore concluded if he would leave me, I would not meddle with him at that juncture. He then swung his sword over my head, damned me, and bid me go about my business, adding, that he only did it to try me. These last words raised my spirits one degree higher than they had been before; for I confess I thought that snapping a loaded pistol at a man's breast, was a harsh mode of trial, and such an one as I had by no means been accustomed to before. I stopped to take up the handspike, thinking to try him with the butt end of that; but upon a moment's consideration, concluded to let the matter rest a little longer, and watch for a more convenient opportunity to resent the injury. The pistol missing fire when snapped at my breast and then going off by my side, was a strong indication to me that Providence had interposed graciously in my preservation, that our final deliverance from the barbarity of the savage Phillips, and his abandoned banditti, might be more speedily effected.

A few weeks now ensued which were spent in tolerable good humor and peace among all hands on board, and myself and friends put on the semblance of content as much as possible, though we were incessantly seeking opportunities to confer with each other upon



some mode of escape; but no proper opportunity occurred, nor indeed were our measures properly concerted as yet.

Again we were called upon to sign their flagitious articles, and become willing members of the piratical band, with menaces of immediate death in case we still refused; but we had heard their threats too often to be frightened into compliance with them now.

A short time after this, being about nine months after I was taken, and about two from the time we fell in with and made prize of the vessel on board of which Harridon was taken, the crew, in commemoration of some signal advantage which they had obtained, had a grand carouse, eating and drinking, and spending the day in such diversions as their gross inclinations required. A favorable opportunity now seemed to offer to extricate us from our suffering, and we determined to improve it if possible. Cheeseman was ordered by Phillips, to bring some tools on deck, and do something towards repairing the ship early next morning, and the master was ordered to take an observation next day at noon, to find out where we were. Thus far Providence seemed to favor our design, and we felt firm in the determination of executing it the next day.

It was late in the evening before the pirates retired to rest, and White and one more of the pirates got in the caboose, as drunk as beasts, and lay down before the fire; a favorable opportunity now seemed to offer for us to improve in conferring upon some means for our escape. We got together, held a consultation, and concluded to risk our lives in trying to work our deliverance, concluding that we had better die in so just a cause, than share the fate of our New England friend, which we had no doubt would soon overtake us, if we persisted in our determination never to sign their articles or share in their unlawful gain.

When I mention that we had determined on an immediate execution of our design, I would inform the reader that there was but three of us, Cheeseman, myself, and the Spanish Indian before mentioned; for poor Harridon declared, that his heart was broken, his resolution and courage gone by a series of ill usage, and that he durst not engage to assist, but would not discover our plot. Thus there remained only three of us to engage the whole crew, and the Indian we felt rather dubious about, though we gained a confidence in him from his having firmly refused several times, though threatened with immediate death, to subscribe the piratical articles. However, I must do him the honor to say he was true to his trust; and had it not been for him, our plot would most probably have failed in the execution.

Cheeseman, the Indian, and myself, got together, and agreed that Cheeseman should leave his broad axe on the main deck when he had

done using it, and when I saw Cheeseman make ready to grasp the master, I was to catch it up, and make the best use of it I could, cutting and slashing all that offered to oppose me, while the Indian was to stand ready to help, as occasion might require. And each one of us, in the mean time, was to do everything he could think of to forward the design.

Our plan being thus concerted, I went down into the caboose, where White and John Rose Archer, a desperate fellow who had been taken in one of the prizes, and immediately joined the pirates, laid on the floor, as before mentioned, drunk as beasts. I took fire and burnt these two villains in the feet, while they lay senseless, so badly as to render them unable to be upon deck next day. There were only four now left of the old pirate gang, and five who had joined them since, besides the two I had rendered incapable of injuring us.

We were up early in the morning, and Cheeseman used the broad axe, and left it as agreed. It was very late in the morning, and the pirates were none of them up, and we were afraid they would not arise until too late to take an observation, and our plan of consequence must fall through. To prevent this, about ten o'clock I went to the cabin door and told the Captain the sun was almost up to the meridian. Damn you, said he, it is none of your business. This was all the thanks I got, and indeed all I expected for my service. However, it answered the end designed, for the Captain, Master, Boatswain, and Quarter-master, came upon the deck, a little after eleven o'clock. Enquiry was made for White and Archer and their burns imputed to accident. Harridon was nearly dead with fear, and the Indian became so near as white as any of us. Phillips took notice of Harridon's paleness, and I cloaked the matter by informing him, that Harridon had been sick all night, and I believed a dram would help him. Phillips told me to go to his case and get a bottle of brandy; which I did, and we all drank heartily except the Indian, who refused to taste a drop, though something apt to drink at other times.

The important crisis drew near, when three of us were to attack the whole crew; the Master prepared to take his observation, and Cheeseman was walking the deck with a hammer in his hand. The Quarter-master was in the cabin, drawing out some leaden slugs for a musket, and the Spanish Indian stood by the cabin door. The Captain and Boatswain stood by the mainmast, talking upon some matters, and I stood partly behind them, whirling the axe around with my foot, till my knees fairly smote together.

The Master being busied, I saw Cheeseman make the motion to heave him over, and I at that instant, split the boatswain's head in

twain with the broad axe, and dropped him upon the deck to welter in his gore. Before the Captain had time to put himself in a posture of defence, I gave him a stroke with the head of my axe, which partly stunned him; at which time Cheeseman having despatched the Master overboard, came to my assistance, and gave the Captain a blow with his hammer, on the back side of his head, which put an immediate end to his mortal existence.

The Quarter-master hearing the bustle, came running out of the cabin with his hand up to strike Cheeseman with his hammer, and would probably have killed him, had not the Indian caught him by the elbow, as he was bringing the hammer down, and there held him, until I came up and gave him a blow on the back side of his head, cutting his wig and neck almost off, so that his head hung down before him.

We had now despatched all the old pirates except White, and demanded a surrender of the vessel, which was granted, and the poor Frenchmen and negroes came to us and embraced our legs and feet, begging for their lives.

We carried the vessel safely into Boston, where White, Archer, and one more of the pirates were tried, condemned and executed; the three other pirates were sent to England, with the vessel, with whom my friend Cheeseman and the Indian went likewise, whom government liberally regarded for their services, and gave Cheeseman an honorable berth in one of the king's shipyards; the three pirates who went home with the vessel, were hung at execution dock, and the vessel was made a prize of by government.

I never saw any of the human species more spiteful than White was, from the time he was taken till he was executed. I believe he would have killed me at any time in that interval, had it been in his power.

The honorable court which condemned the pirates gave me Captain Phillips' gun, silver hilted sword, silver shoe and knee buckles, a curious tobacco box, and two gold rings that the pirate Captain Phillips used to wear.

When we came in sight of the castle near Boston, we hoisted our pirate's colors and fired a gun, as a signal for them to come off to us. At this time some of the pirates were on deck, and one of them asked leave to fire another gun, which being granted, he would not swab the gun out nor have the vent stopped, but put in the cartridge, and stood directly before the muzzle to ram it down, by which means the cartridge took fire and blew him into pieces; it is supposed he did this purposely, in order to escape the punishment which he knew must be his lot in case he was carried into the harbor.















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